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ABSTRACT

Data drawn from the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 and follow-up surveys through 1979 were used to explore career and educational patterns of two groups of women: those who received their high school education in rural areas and remained, and those who left for larger communities. Over 40% of the sample were classified as rural in both 1972 and 1979 (unweighted n=907; weighted n=144,016); nearly 60% of those women who lived in rural areas when they completed high school had moved away by 1979 (unweighted n=1,418; weighted n=182,785). Three classes of variables were selected: educational expectations and attainment, occupational expectations and attainment, and marital and family status. Data clearly suggested that rural residence following high school graduation was an important factor in career and educationl patterns of women. Those women who did not remain in rural communities attained higher levels of education and more diverse occupational status. More rural women were married and more non-rural women were single or no longer married. Two-thirds of the rural women had children while less than one-half of the non-rural women did. Subsequent analyses stressing the multivariate nature of attainment models will add psychological, attitudinal, and role model variables. (BRR)

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CAREER AND EDUCATION PATTERNS OF RURAL WOMEN

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Career and Education Patterns of Rural Women

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ABSTRACT

This research explores career and educational patterns of two groups of women: those who receive their high school education in rural areas and remain and those who leave for larger communities. Data are drawn from the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 and follow-up surveys through 1979. Descriptive profiles relating to educational and occupational expectations and attainments, marital and family status, and current work activities are developed for each group. Results suggest that those who leave rural communities for larger areas attain more education and are able to translate these attainments into high status, more non-traditional careers.

Career and Education Patterns of Rural Women

Although close to sixty percent of adult women (including those from rural areas) are now in the labor force, their occupations continue to encompass those fields traditionally occupied by women (e.g. sales, teaching, and nursing). Theoretical and empirical explanations for an understanding of the status attainment process for women -- how women proceed from their origins to their current occupational (and educational) attainments -- are clearly complex. Factors associated with women's occupational choices are diverse, but at least are partially related to their educational and occupational aspirations (Lichtman, Rothschild & Peng, 1981; Wolfle & Lichtman, 1980); their marital and family status (Broschart, 1978; Waite & Moore, 1978); and exposure to role models (Almquist & Angrist, 1971; Douvan, 1976). Availability of career options and acceptance of women in fields other than those usually considered traditionally female may also be influenced by the geographical location in which a woman finds herself during her high school years as well as the years following high school completion.

Little research has been conducted on the effects of geographic location on status attainment, although Haller and Sewell (1967) conducted some of their initial research on farm youth in Wisconsin. Since both the availability of non-traditional careers and the acceptance of women in such non-traditional career paths is less likely for women who grow up and remain in rural areas than for women who choose to leave rural areas after completion of their high school careers, we would expect to find differences in early occupational attainments and in educational

attainments between women who remain in rural areas and those who leave those areas. We could hypothesize further that the latter group would be more inclined to choose careers that may be considered non-traditional and to pursue advanced levels of educational attainment.

This research builds on status attainment literature that considers family background, social-psychological components, and marital and family status as factors related to pursuit of advanced education and career choice by adding a consideration of the influence of geographical location.

The purpose of this study is to compare educational and occupational expectations and attainments of two groups of women: those who received their high school education and remained in rural communities and those who were educated in rural areas for their high school years, but moved to other types of communities after completion of high school.

Related Research

Little research has been conducted on the effects of migration from rural to urban areas on educational and occupational aspirations and attainments, although Burchinal, Haller and Taves (1962) and Shannon (1961) noted in some early research that young people who migrated to compete with urban youth were often unsuccessful in their careers. A much greater focus, however, has been on the general process of status attainment of rural youth (Haller & Porters, 1973; Otto & Haller, 1979), while some research has considered the attainment process specifically for rural women. Cosby and Charner (1978), in their longitudinal study of rural high school graduates, concluded that early marriage and fertility depressed attainment for women.

Unfortunately, status attainment models for rural women are subject to the same criticisms noted in the more general status attainment literature. While Otto and Haller (1979) developed a successful model for explaining the attainment process for rural men, they omitted factors likely to have an impact on status attainment for rural women. Dunne (1980) identified fertility, sex-role orientations, and occupational sex-stereotyping as possible explanatory variables, responding to O'Leary's (1979) and Falk and Cosby's (1978) suggestions that an appropriate model for the explanation of women's status attainment be developed.

Dunne's (1980) excellent review of the relevant literature concerning the status attainment process among rural women highlights what she refers to as their "unenviable situation." She states the dilemma: "Like her male peers, she faces the constraints which come with rural origins. Like metro females, she must struggle with the social factors which affect women in the United States. Finally, she must come to terms with the traditional expectations associated with rural culture, expectations which place particular limitations on women (p. 397)".

Although acknowledging that rural youth have depressed attainments, Dunne (1980) concludes that many factors differentially affect rural women. O'Leary (1979) rejects the hypothesis that rural women are reluctant to enter the labor market, citing census data that 48 percent of non-metro women are in the labor market, although they are concentrated in low-skilled and low-paying jobs. Flora and Johnson (1978) confirm O'Leary's data with the finding that a majority of rural women are in the labor force.

One explanation offered for low levels of occupational attainments among rural women (Almquist, 1977; Butler, 1975; Falk & Salter, 1978) is that the women may be involved in self-stereotyping. Burke and Tully (1977) concur and suggest in addition that occupational sex-stereotyping reflects the culture's views of sex roles in general.

The differences noted between rural and non-rural women in occupational and career choices are not carried over into their educational attainments. In fact, somewhat unexpected are Fratoe's (1979) data of no differences between educational attainments of rural and non-rural women or between rural women and men. In fact, Fratoe reports that rural whites are quite well-educated, completing an average of 12.2 years of school.

Although the above literature helps provide a framework for the understanding of the attainment process for rural women, questions related to migration have not been addressed directly. This paper provides some initial data that will enable us to understand factors related to the effects of geographic location during the high school years and beyond on the attainment of educational goals and the subsequent choice of careers.

Methods

Data for this research are drawn from the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 and the four subsequent follow-ups in 1973, 1974, 1976, and 1979. The original study, under the auspices of the National Center for Education Statistics, was conducted as a two-stage stratified probability sample with schools as the first stage and students as the second. Close to 85 percent of the sample completed all phases.

For this study, only women who attended high school in rural areas in 1972 were included. These women were then subdivided into those who, in 1979, were still in rural areas and those who had moved into larger towns, cities, or suburbs. Over 40 percent of the sample are classified as rural in both 1972 and 1979 (unweighted n = 907; weighted n = 144,016); close to 60 percent of those women who were living in rural areas when they completed high school had moved away by 1979 (unweighted n = 1,418; weighted n = 182,785).

Consistent with the literature on the status attainment process for women, a number of variables were selected to develop these initial profiles comparing women whose geographic location remain rural with those who leave rural areas and migrate to larger towns and cities. In particular, three classes of variables have been selected. Subsequent analyses stressing the multivariate nature of attainment models will add additional psychological, attitudinal, and role model variables; research is currently in progress.

Data for each of the three classes of variables used in this preliminary research are drawn from the questionnaires completed by these subjects in 1979 as part of their panel participation in the National Longitudinal Study (NLS).

Educational expectations and attainments - The number of years of education beyond high school the woman expected to finish and the number of years beyond high school she actually finished, respectively. Possible responses ranged from 0 (no additional education) to 6 (graduate school).

Occupational expectations and attainment - The type of occupation she hoped to attain at age 30. Possible responses are categorized according to one of fourteen job categories ranging from professional to unskilled laborer. The attainment variable is a measure of current occupational status and is coded according to Duncan's SEI index.

Marital and family status - These two variable are dichotomously coded as being married or not and having children or not.

Results

Congruities and dissimilarities between rural and non-rural women are reported here for the three classes of variables identified above.

Educational expectations and attainment

Clear differences between rural and non-rural women both in terms of educational expectations and actual attainments are observed and reported in Table 1. In spite of Fratoe's findings (1978) that educational attainment of rural women is similar to non-rural women, these data reflect otherwise. Both in terms of expectations and attainments, close to two-thirds of the rural women do not expect to continue their education beyond high school; in fact the amount of education they have attained bears this out. In sharp contrast, however, the data reveal that less than half of non-rural women have a "no college" expectation. Expectations of advanced degrees follows this same pattern, where only 8 percent of rural women expect advanced degrees while almost 15 percent of non-rural women do. Attainments are low for both groups; the data show less than 1 percent of rural and 2 percent of non-rural receiving advanced degrees. Thus we see a pattern emerging that will continue to

Table 1

1979 College Educational Expectations

College Expectation Level	Category of Women			
	Rural-Rural		Rural-Non-Rural	
	f	%	f	%
Will not attend	93227	65.0	82381	46.8
Less than 2 years	14187	9.9	17521	10.0
At least 2 years	13356	9.3	19228	10.9
4 year degree	11426	8.0	25485	14.5
Masters degree	9122	6.4	24018	13.6
Ph.D. or Professor	2097	1.5	7403	4.2

Note: Frequencies and percentages are weighted; percents may not equal 100 due to rounding.

precludе full opportunity for the range of educational areas for those women who remain in rural areas.

Occupational expectations and Current status

One of the questions asked in the 1979 follow-up survey was what type of occupation these women expect to have at age 30. Similiarities in categories of expectations selected are noted in Table 2 although some differences in percent of women choosing categories are also observed.

Only three categories were chosen by at least 10 percent of both groups of women: full-time homemaker, clerical, and professional. For the rural women, the homemaker category was selected by about one-third. This represented the category with the highest preference. In contrast, slightly less than 20 percent of non-rural women expect to be full-time homemakers at age 30. Another category highly preferred by both groups is clerical, which 20 percent of rural and non-rural women chose. Finally, the professional category was preferred by almost 20 percent of the non-rural women, but only 10 percent of rural women.

The remaining categories were selected by only a small percentage of either group. Some differences in preferences are noted with more of the non-rural women selecting such categories as managers/administrators, teachers, and other professionals and more of the rural women selecting categories of operators and farmers.

One could speculate from these not unexpected findings that either gender or geography may contribute to the narrowness in preferred range of occupations; however, the differences in preferences between the two groups of women seem related more to geography than other variables.

Table 2

Occupational Expectations at 30 Years of Age

Occupational Category	Category of Women			
	Rural-Rural		Rural-Non-Rural	
	f	%	f	%
Clerical	28806	20.2	36099	20.6
Craftsman	2357	1.7	2196	1.3
Farm worker	4452	3.1	273	.2
Full-time homemaker	44190	31.0	32214	18.3
Laborer	1532	1.1	2177	1.2
Manager/Administrator	4642	3.3	12373	7.1
Military	-	-	1094	.6
Operative	7488	5.3	4935	2.8
Professional (Type A)	14378	10.1	33098	18.9
Professional (Type B)	2170	1.5	5842	3.3
Proprietor/owner	2444	1.7	3689	2.1
Protective service	691	.5	1483	.8
Sales	3657	2.6	7252	4.1
Teacher	6817	4.8	12476	7.1
Service	5996	4.2	6414	3.6
Technical	4850	3.4	6244	3.5
Not looking	7896	5.6	7296	4.1

Note: Frequencies and percentages are weighted; percents may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Other contrasts between these two groups of women concerning their current work and homemaking status can also be observed. Some 60 percent of the rural women are working outside the home, a figure comparable to that of women in general. But there are as many as 70 percent of non-rural women working outside the home. Although we don't have data regarding occupational distributions (due to the manner in which the data are reported), it is not unreasonable to expect that most of these women occupy low-status, low-paying jobs, although perhaps less true for those who have migrated.

And although some 60 percent of rural women are working, there are still over two-thirds who describe themselves as homemakers. In contrast, only half of the non-rural women do. Dunne's comments regarding the traditional expectations of rural culture may present even greater difficulties as these women seek to balance the conflicting needs of self, family, and culture, on the one hand, and the economic realities of rural life on the other (see Table 3).

Marriage and children

The patterns of family status for the two groups of women are as expected: more rural women are married (77% versus 63%) and more non-rural women are single (26% versus 17%) or no longer married (11% versus 6%) because of divorce or widowhood. Table 4 provides these data. This reinforces the research of Maret and Chenoweth (1979), Cosby and Charner (1978), among others.

Similar patterns are found regarding fertility. Two-thirds of the rural women have children while less than one-half of the non-rural women do. In both groups of women, the number of children in their family

Table 3

Status in 1979

1979 Status	Category of Women			
	Rural-Rural		Rural-Non-Rural	
	f	%	f	%
Working?:				
yes - full or part-time	87881	63.1	126703	74.6
no	51331	36.9	43175	25.4
Homemaker?:				
yes	98386	68.4	89019	50.4
no	45343	31.5	87441	49.6

Note: Frequencies and percentages are weighted.

Table 4

Family Status

Status and Responses	Category of Women			
	Rural-Rural		Rural-Non-Rural	
	f	%	f	%
Marital:				
Single	24487	17.1	46536	26.4
Married	110375	77.2	110564	62.6
No longer married	8202	5.7	19360	11.0
Children?:				
Yes	93417	65.3	81786	46.5
No	49648	34.7	94178	53.5
Number of Children:				
One	44423	47.5	41065	49.6
Two	36670	39.2	31885	38.5
Three or more	12461	13.3	9862	11.9

Note: Frequencies and percentages are weighted.

is about the same, with almost one-half having one child and one-tenth having three or more.

Discussion

These data clearly suggest that rural residence following high school graduation is an important factor in career and educational patterns of women. Those women who leave rural communities for other types of communities after completing their high school education attain higher levels of education and more diverse occupational status.

These findings raise a multiplicity of questions regarding career and educational choice for rural women. At the same time, they suggest many additional topics for further research studies.

Studies that measure the values and attitudes of those students who remain in rural residence compared with those educated in rural high schools who left for larger communities could provide some real insight into reasons for making that choice. Measures of self-confidence and other personality traits of the two groups could yield valuable information to counselors.

It is especially important to examine the high school records of these two groups for evidence of differences in achievement scores, grade point averages and results of tests that measure native intellectual ability. Determination of no significant differences between the two groups on these factors would enhance the value of the findings of this study.

An examination of the perceptions held by these women of a selected group of professional occupations could reveal any differences that might govern choices. This information could be used to develop seminars,

workshops, field experiences and short term exposure to various occupations for purposes of providing high school women with more accurate perceptions of the world outside the rural parameters.

This study has provided a beginning step in a long process. Focusing on women educated in rural high schools, it is nevertheless part of a larger research problem of how to identify factors that govern the career and educational choices of women. This, in turn improved programming by educators to assist women in meeting their fullest potential. The educator's challenge remains the development of our nation's human resources.

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